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longing to their parts, and that these valuable things are far more specific than abstract pleasure, and far more diffused than one's personal life. It is also true (though I have not had space to follow Mr. Russell here) that the value of what is good is not in the least dependent on freedom of the will or on indeterminism, nor on the operation of final causes or providence in the world. For this relief much thanks. What a pity if this pure morality, in detaching itself impetuously from the earth, whose bright satellite it might be, should fly into the abyss at a tangent, and leave us as much in the dark as before!

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DISCUSSION

DO WE FORGET THE DISAGREEABLE?

THE specific object of this paper is to offer a few suggestions and the results of a little experimentation on the relationship of disagreeable feeling to recall. In the simplest form of learning, "learning by trial and error," we begin with activity of an aimless sort, and by a process of selection eliminate all such movements as result in disagreeable consequences, saving as an habitual reaction to the situation one which proves agreeable in its outcome. We banish disagreeable reactions. Do we forget disagreeable experiences?

In a very interesting and suggestive article entitled "The Oblivescence of the Disagreeable," published in this JOURNAL,¹ Dr. Hollingworth maintains that we do. He regards such forgetting as an unquestionable fact, and as but an example of the tendency in trial and error learning to eliminate disagreeable reactions. I do not dissent entirely from Dr. Hollingworth's view, but it seems to me that it needs a very important amendment. He points out in the very beginning of his article the fact, so often noted, that the memory of an episode that was very disagreeable may be decidedly agreeable. It is quite as true that the opposite may occur. Agreeable incidents may be uncomfortably remembered. The classic literary expression of the former fact is Virgil's account of how Æneas tried to comfort his followers, shipwrecked on the coast of Africa, by telling them that at some future day they would find delight in telling of their hardships; "Olim haec meminisse juvabit." So Dante, in Tennyson's rendering, has phrased the opposite tendency in his "Sorrow's crown of sorrow is remembering happier things." The memory of a

¹ Vol. VII., No. 26.

disagreeable experience may be agreeable, disagreeable, or indifferent. Which effect we get depends very largely on the relation of the past experience to our present situation. If it constitutes a difficulty overcome, or one of trifling importance in relation to our subsequent history, we are apt to view it with pleasure or indifference. On the other hand, if the episode is one that had bad consequences, the effect of which is still in evidence, we may shudder to recall it. It is not pleasant to recall a contemptible act of which one was guilty, a failure that has left a permanent record upon the estimate placed by others upon one, or the death of a relative whose loss has limited one's life.

In Dr. Hollingworth's article he does not, it seems to me, keep constantly in mind the difference between forgetting experiences that were disagreeable when we had them and banishing the thought of experiences when their memory is disagreeable. We might very well tend to get rid of disagreeable memories, while we would not at all tend to forget disagreeable experiences merely because they were such, since the memory of them might not be disagreeable. We have thus before us two issues, each of which I should like briefly to discuss: (1) Do we tend to forget disagreeable experiences? (2) Do we tend to banish and so get rid of disagreeable memories?

1. Do we forget the disagreeable? Much of Dr. Hollingworth's argumentation is devoted to establishing the contention that we do. I can not take up all of his points in detail without over-emphasizing the controversial element in my discussion. It seems to me, however, that his non-theoretical evidence can be grouped under two heads. First, he mentions many cases where phases of our own lives or of the lives of others seem to us, as we think of them, singularly free from those harsher elements that were so uncomfortable when we experienced them. These cases, I think, can all be reduced to instances where either the memory of a disagreeable circumstance is itself pleasant or indifferent, or the memory is still disagreeable and is banished because of its present quality. Under the first heading would come Mark Twain's memories of his travels abroad, the canonization of saints, etc. Here, I venture to suggest, what happens is not that the incidents that were disagreeable were forgotten, nor even that the fact that they were disagreeable has disappeared from memory, but rather that the memory of an event, as a whole, or of the career or achievements of a character, is a pleasant one, doubtless because of the relation of these achievements to one's present life. One is not forgetting the disagreeable, but merely having a pleasant memory of that which originally included much that was disagreeable. Under the second explanation come such cases as forgetting a criminal's past record in judging him. One is so over-

come by sympathy for the present plight of the man that the memory of his misdeeds is uncomfortable, since it commands one to do a disagreeable duty. We banish the inconvenient thought. In the same way, I think, we may explain Freud's cases, cited by Dr. Hollingworth.

The second line of evidence offered by Dr. Hollingworth consists of material collected by Dr. Colgrove. The latter sent out a questionnaire containing the query, "Do you recall pleasant or unpleasant experiences better?" To his questionnaire in general he received 1,658 answers. He does not state how many answered his inquiry about remembering the pleasant or unpleasant. In general, he found that the greater number thought they tended to remember better the pleasant. It must be noted that these are but opinions, probably not verified by any careful study on the part of those who made the answers. I have made an attempt to get at the facts by experimenting, and I offer my results, such as they are, for inspection. I worked with ten subjects. Each person was asked to give me incidents that were remembered from his or her life. These incidents began with the earliest that could be recalled, and were scattered, with some attempt at an even distribution, over the entire life. Seven of my subjects were college students in the neighborhood of twenty years of age. Three were approaching middle life. Six were men, four women. I asked them to give these incidents just as they arose in memory, without selecting one sort rather than another. My results indicated that this rule was followed rather conscientiously, and in some cases I felt a little as though I had transgressed upon the office of a confessor. As the incidents came I jotted down a note which enabled me to recall each to the subject who gave it. After getting from a person a hundred such memories, I asked him to grade each of these according to whether it represented an incident which when it happened was very agreeable, moderately agreeable, indifferent, moderately disagreeable, or very disagreeable. The thousand incidents recalled were divided as follows: very agreeable, 28.3 per cent.; agreeable, 26.8 per cent.; indifferent 11.8 per cent.; disagreeable, 12.6 per cent.; very disagreeable, 20.5 per cent. Putting in each case all the agreeable experiences, and also all the disagreeable ones, we get

Agreeable,	55.1 per cent.	Average deviation, 6.7 per cent.
Indifferent,	11.8 per cent.	Average deviation, 4.6 per cent.
Disagreeable,	33.1 per cent.	Average deviation, 4.7 per cent.

The comparative smallness of the average deviation seems to indicate that these percentages are fairly representative for the classes of persons tested. It would seem, therefore, that the hypothesis that we

forget the disagreeable rather than the agreeable is verified by my results. Some of my subjects expressed themselves after the experiment as thinking that they remembered better the disagreeable. All of them recalled more of the agreeable. One might suspect that we should find a similar state of affairs among those of Dr. Colgrove's subjects who thought that they remembered better the disagreeable.

I am, however, inclined to think that these facts, so far from proving, as they may seem to do, that we forget the disagreeable, may actually tend to support the view that there is no such tendency. Three reasons may be advanced to sustain this view. First, we may suspect that the subjects were less willing to mention disagreeable experiences than those of the opposite type. I do not think that this motive had any appreciable influence on the character of the memories related to me. It would lead to the concealment only of experiences of which the subject felt ashamed, or such as were of a very private nature but might be either agreeable or the opposite, or, perhaps, incidents the memory of which now gives pain. Moreover, some agreeable experiences might have been suppressed on account of fear of being regarded as conceited or self-congratulatory. Careful observation of the subjects and a study of their records convince me that there was not enough suppression to affect appreciably the averages.

A second objection to my averages might be found in the possibility that my subjects failed to give accurately the feeling of their original experiences. Incidents that were in reality disagreeable might be thought to have been the opposite. The feeling tone of the later memory might be confused with that of the original incident. This error might work to swell the percentages of either agreeable or disagreeable experiences recalled. On Dr. Hollingworth's theory it would have unduly enlarged the percentage of agreeable ones. However, I am convinced from the character of my material that erroneous judgments as to the feeling tone of the original experience were rare.

A third objection to the interpretation of my percentages as indicating the forgetting of the disagreeable is more important. It is quite likely that in the lives of most of us the agreeable incidents far outnumber the disagreeable ones. I have not attempted to make any actual calculations on this matter, yet I am inclined to think that such an effort might not be so fruitless as at first it is likely to seem. However, there is much to suggest the view that most of us find the daily run of our lives filled with incidents on the whole pleasurable, and that experiences admittedly distasteful are comparatively uncommon. To be felt as such they must be so disagreeable that this quality overcomes our natural zest for the new

and the exciting, or our obstinate tendency to take things philosophically or to present a good appearance. If, then, the agreeable greatly outnumber the disagreeable experiences, the fact that 33 per cent. of memories represent disagreeable experiences while only 55 per cent. represent agreeable ones, might actually mean that we remember a larger proportion of our disagreeable experiences than we do of our agreeable ones.

2. So far as our first question, Do we forget the disagreeable? is concerned, I am inclined to think that the facts we have examined suggest a negative answer. There remains the second question. Do we tend to get rid of disagreeable memories? Here our analogy of trial and error learning seems to apply directly. We shrink back from disagreeable reactions. We dislike to entertain disagreeable ideas. However, we sometimes do disagreeable things because we fear more disagreeable ones or hope for a reward. So, too, we attend to disagreeable ideas in order that the situations that they represent may be avoided or done away with. The idea of a disagreeable thing gets its disagreeable quality from the belief in the present or future existence of that which it represents, and if through the idea we can avoid the fact, it would seem to be the highest prudence to court the idea. Consciousness here has the paradoxical function of keeping a thing in mind just to get rid of it.

If disagreeable thoughts do not lead to efficient activities, it is likely that they tend to disappear. Healthy men of the world do not talk or think much of death. *Memento mori* is advice that finds little favor with them. Yet if they could see any chance of finally avoiding that dread event by thinking of it, I suspect that this mental indifference would turn in most cases into profound interest. When thought can not cure the situation, we, instead, cure the thought by forgetting it. We forget not so much disagreeable ideas as useless ideas, ideas the distasteful quality of which stimulates us to no devices that modify their object. Thought struggles with a disagreeable memory or idea that portrays any of the interests of the self in an unsatisfactory position, endeavoring either to discover some activity by which this position may be remedied, or some interpretation by which the irritation of it can be assuaged. When we can neither do anything to remedy the case, nor see it differently, it is likely that we tend to forget.

In truth, the function of cognition is such that for us to forget the disagreeable would mean that we would be deprived of one of the principal resources of thinking. Trial and error learning forms habits by eliminating certain reactions and saving others as habitual responses. Conscious learning proceeds by thinking over ideas of possible reactions to the emergency at hand, comparing them with

beliefs as to the present facts, the laws of nature, etc., and eliminating such as do not conform. But in order to get ideas for its consideration, it must remember the failures of trial and error learning as well as its successes. To remember only the successes would leave us with no material for thought except that which is already embodied, as it were, in the habitual reactions built up by trial and error learning. To readjust these habits by thinking, to use intelligence to learn anew, requires ideas of the effect of the other ways of reacting. To forget failures, the disagreeable, would mean to forget at least a large part of that by which mental or ideational readjustment is made possible. If we remember in order to readjust, it would seem unlikely that we should forget all except that which offers to consciousness in the main only something to be amended. Even in trial and error learning intelligence appears in remembering the futility of certain efforts as contrasted with the success of others. Such intelligence cuts short the process of experimentation. We remember to eliminate. Moreover, the experience thus acquired furnishes the basis of later reasonings in regard to new situations. We remember in order to modify. Thus conscious experience represents a saving of that not useful now, but useful only in the emergencies in which it is to be recalled.

The feeling that accompanies its recall has no necessary connection with that which characterized its acquisition. Then, the failure was disagreeable; now, the thought of it may be agreeable, since it offers a possible way out of a difficulty. Then, a certain reaction, and so also the thought of it, was agreeable, and the reaction became a habit. Now, that reaction, and its thought, are disagreeable, since to-day they fail to adjust us properly. Cognition is descriptive, neutral, and aims at universality, truth. It strives to anchor certain ideas to certain facts, so that they may be dependable for reflection. Feeling is selective, partial, and clings to the particular situation, giving it a characterization likely to be true only for the moment. We strive to banish *disagreeableness* by every device in our power. But before we resort to the ostrich remedy, and banish disagreeableness by forgetting the incidents with which it is associated, we strive to modify either these situations or our interpretations of them so that the thought of them is no longer a source of discomfort. Otherwise thinking would be impossible, for the difficult situations that provoke it would promptly be forgotten rather than thought out.

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